

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FOLG SENT ACTION ACTION DELHI INFO BOMBAY, MADRAS DTD
JAN 17 RPTD FOR YOUR INFO.

QUOTE.

C O N F I D E N T I A L CALCUTTA 0137

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJ: WEST BENGAL POLITICAL SITUATION: RAY AND HIS
SUPPORTERS HAVE THE UPPER HAND

1. FOR NOW AT LEAST, CHIEF MINISTER S.S. RAY AND HIS
SUPPORTERS CLEARLY HAVE THE UPPER HAND IN THE STRUGGLE
TO KEEP RAY IN OFFICE. ALTHOUGH THE ARRANGEMENTS WORKED
OUT IN NEW DELHI AT THE END OF DECEMBER WERE DESIGNED
TO WEAKEN RAY (OR AT LEAST SEEMED TO BE) THAT HAS NOT
BEEN THEIR EFFECT. FOR EXAMPLE, APPOINTMENT OF TARUN
KANTI GHOSH AS HOME MINISTER APPEARS TO BE HAVING NO
IMPACT AT ALL. WE UNDERSTAND THAT WHEN TARUN KANTI
ASKED IF HE WOULD HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE PERSONNEL
SHIFTS IN THE WEST BENGAL AND CALCUTTA POLICE HE WAS
TOLD OF COURSE,
BUT THEY WOULD HAVE TO BE APPROVED BY
THE CHIEF MINISTER. THE SIX MEMBER OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
HAS BECOME AN INSTRUMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER'S, ONE
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OF THE THREE OPPOSITION MEMBERS (MINISTER FOR PUBLIC UNDER-
TAKINGS ZAIN AL ABEDINE) HAVING SWITCHED TO RAY'S
SIDE.

2. FAR FROM RESPONDING TO RECENT AGITATION BY RAY AND
HIS SUPPORTERS (CALCUTTA 0082), RAY'S OPPONENTS ARE

KEEPING QUIET AND SEEM TO BE DISPERSING. WE HEAR THAT ANOTHER TEST OF STRENGTH MAY BE COMING AT THE END OF THE MONTH, BUT FOR THE MOMENT THINGS ARE VERY QUIET AND UNLESS RAY'S OPPONENTS GAIN REINVIGORATION FROM THE CENTER THEY ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE ABLE TO PUT UP A SERIOUS CHALLENGE. RAY IS RIDING THE CREST OF A WAVE OF BENGALI NATIONAL SENTIMENT DIRECTED AGAINST SANJAY GANDHI AND THOSE IN THE STATE IDENTIFIED WITH SANJAY. WE ARE TOLD THAT THIS SENTIMENT IS SO STRONG THAT SANJAY'S PEOPLE HERE FEEL THEY SPELL VIOLENCE, AND THAT THIS IS THE REASON THEY HAVE KEPT SO QUIET RECENTLY. SOME HAVE AVOIDED TAKING SIDES AND THEREBY HAVE INCURRED SANJAY'S WRATH. THIS IS THE CASE OF PANKOT BANERJEE, WHO WAS JUST FIRED AS SECRETARY OF THE ALL INDIA YOUTH CONGRESS - AN ACTION WHICH WE ARE TOLD HAS WON BANERJEE GREAT POPULARITY IN THE STATE. BARID BARAN DAS, WHO WAS INSTALLED BY SANJAY LAST FALL AS PRESIDENT OF THE WEST BENGAL YOUTH CONGRESS, IS IN MUCH THE SAME SITUATION. HE HAS STAYED NEUTRAL IN THE FIGHT BETWEEN THE PRO AND ANTI-RAY FORCES AND AS A RESULT IS SAID TO BE IN TROUBLE WITH SANJAY. WE HEAR THAT HE MAY SOON SUBMIT HIS RESIGNATION - IF HE IS NOT FIRED FIRST.

3. THE COOLER HEADS AMONG RAY'S SUPPORTERS REALIZE THAT THEY ARE PLAYING A DANGEROUS GAME IN DEFYING SANJAY. THE CENTER HAS TOO MANY POWERS - BOTH POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC TO BE DISMISSED LIGHTLY, AND THERE IS MUCH

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SPECULATION OVER HOW IT MAY REACT. SOME SPEAK OF THE POSSIBILITY THAT CERTAIN OF RAY'S SUPPORTERS ON THE LEFT - P.R. DAS MUNSHI, SAUGATA ROY, AND POSSIBLY SOME CPI FIGURES - MAY SIMPLY BE ARRESTED. OTHERS DISMISS THIS AS UNLIKELY BUT POINT OUT THAT THERE ARE MANY OTHER WAYS IN WHICH SANJAY CAN MAKE HIS DISPLEASURE FELT; THEY ACKNOWLEDGE ALSO THAT WITH THE INDUSTRIAL RECESSION IN WEST BENGAL DEEPENING - AS IT HAS BEEN IN RECENT WEEKS - THE STATE IS NOW MORE THAN EVER IN NEED OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE FROM THE CENTER. FOR THE MOMENT, HOWEVER, BENGALI DISLIKE OF SANJAY AND POPULAR RESENTMENT OVER HIS MEDDLING IN THE STATE'S AFFAIRS SEEM TO HAVE OVER-RIDDEN OTHER CONSIDERATIONS. KORN UNQUOTE SCHNEIDER

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